



# GBN AUSTRALIA BOOKCLUB

INTELLECTUAL TOOLS FOR THE YEARS AHEAD

In the beginning there was the message! And then there was Marshall McLuhan's insightful insistence that the message could not be isolated from the medium. Indeed, as he argued with great animation, the medium IS the message: change the nature of the former and you perforce change the essence of the latter.

But there is more. Not only is the medium the message, but the message is reality — the only reality that we can know is that which we bring forth through our messages to each other. And if the medium is the message and the message is reality, then the medium of communication, the manner through which we engage with discourse, becomes the medium through which we create the reality of the world around us!

Witness the wonderful world wide web. In its novelty, it is not only providing a new medium through which a staggering number of people across the globe can communicate their messages to each other, but that very process of message communication is changing both the nature of the medium, and of the globe itself. A brave new world is emerging through being talked up into existence: a new path is being laid down through the talking as the walking. What once was just the globe is now a discursive global network, as we work increasingly towards transforming ourselves into a single, globalised network society, modelling our efforts on the inter-connected nature of nature, as we have come to 'understand' and believe it to be. The virtual and the real have become very fuzzy aspects of one another.

So, through our ideas, and the way we are communicating them, we are creating a whole new reality. Walking the talk of such ideas into existence, it is we ourselves who create the economic, social, cultural, political, and perhaps even spiritual 'forces' of the world about us. It is our past experience with this process, that now gives us confidence to talk of creating the future that we want for ourselves — oh, and perhaps for others too, if pressed on the matter.

But herein lies the rub, for who is to do the pressing? There is little to suggest in all of our current 'talking up' of futures that we desire, and that we increasingly believe that we can creatively influence, that those who have been excluded from such discourse in the past will be included either now or in the future. The new media are neither universal in their distribution nor symmetric in their influence. The nature and dynamics of the electronic media as the message, are emphasising the need for a new morality — the need for new mechanisms through which individuals and communities alike can ensure that everyone is involved in decisions about what it is that we all should do next.

When this Book Club was first launched, it was the dream of its founders that it would become a medium for discourse, and that the members of the Australian Business Network, as it then was, prompted perhaps by the comments of the reviewers, would actively participate in the evolution of a discursive reality for Australian business that was explicitly sensitive to its ethical responsibilities. While we have fallen far short of that vision thus far, our efforts continue.

Interestingly enough, both of the selections this month well illustrate the significance of the new medium, for each of the authors invite their readers to join the discourse that they are promoting, through www connections. In this manner, the passive form of discourse of the book, a monologue if you will, is being transformed into a discursive web of dialogue. While both books focus on matters concerned with influencing the future, both also illustrate some of the ways through which such influence may be achieved through web-based discourse. ●

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## *The Clock of the Long Now*

*Stewart Brand, Basic Books, 1999*

In 1972 humanity saw for the first time the dazzling picture of our beautiful, fragile planet in space. In 1978, sociologist Elise Boulding proposed the notion of the 200 year present, now an iconic concept in futures studies. Through the concept of *The Clock of the Long Now*, Stewart Brand extends Boulding's powerful image to create vistas of Deep Time that he hopes will have a similar effect on our psyche as that image of the earth — that of a 20,000 year present, or Long Now. This monumental sweep of time takes us 10,000 years back to where civilisation started, and forward by the same amount. It operates at the mythic level, the life span of human culture itself. Shorter than Brian Swimme's cosmological Deep Time, the Long Now is our own human timeframe; a mere 400 generations.

*The Clock of the Long Now* is the story of the vision of an eclectic group who call themselves the Long Now Foundation. Their mission is to create a clock which will allow us to engage with the Long Now. The Clock of the Long Now, whose physical presence is a giant mechanical clock, is to be located somewhere in an American desert, a place of wide horizons and high preservation climate. Along with the clock there is to be a library, a 'library of the deep future'. Through the telling of how the project was conceived and is being executed, Stewart Brand forces us to think in terms of vastly different time frames and consider their implications. Indeed the idea is so profound that even the American IRS (Taxation Office) gave it immediate approval for public education non-profit status.

The Clock provides the framework for the book, and the book for the Clock. Even the page numbers in digital display exhort us to think differently about time. As Brand states, 'though the chapters are written in logical sequence, they do not attempt a sequential and conclusive argument. They are a mosaic ... a separate essay' (p 00:05). And what a fascinating mosaic it is.

For Brand, different timeframes are needed for different working structures and purposes. Nature has deep, slow cycles which cannot be forced into the quick ephemeral cycles of fashion and commerce. To try to do this is to destroy the very ecosystems which support life. Through a series of separate but connected examples, Brand shows us why we need to think about time differently. Early in the book we encounter the troubling Moore's Law, which states that the number of transistors that can fit on a computer chip is doubling every 18 months. What happens when Moore's Law reaches the natural limits of atomic size and quantum physics? We hit Moore's Wall. And something of which most of us are probably unaware — that digital information is not forever. In digital systems, storage is not the same as preservation. We are in danger of losing our recent cultural record if a way is not found to archive and preserve digital artefacts. These issues are new territory.

The next section of the book takes us on an exciting journey which describes the unfolding of the Clock/Library project. Part of the journey is the challenge of solving engineering and technological problems never before conceived. How do you build something to last for 10,000 years? Perhaps more interesting for futurists, the book invites us to share in Long Now's generative thinking about the mythic dimension of the project. Here is a clock as cultural tool, exhorting us to recognise time in a very deep way, to use it to develop foresight.

What would the Clock/Library complex actually be? The Foundation's vision is that the Clock/Library would be a living monument. Here is a different vision of the future, one of continuity and perpetual renewal. Visitors would actually be within the Clock, experiencing from its interior its slow rhythms, built not on the fleeting, artificial timeframes of humanity, but on the great cycles of the universe itself. A giant pendulum would beat out its period every 10 seconds, and it would tick only once a day. A series of mechanisms would create progressively slower ticks so that the last one is on a 25,784 year cycle — the speed of the precession of the equinoxes.

The thinking around the notion of the Library is fascinating. Doug Carlston, a Foundation member, imagined in a dream creating messages to the future placed in time bottles. These could remind future generations that we did know about global warming or deforestation. And they will leave future generations to judge whether we developed the foresight, the cultural tools or the vision to retrieve our future. This is a brilliant and concrete way of invoking futures thinking to influence thinking in the here and now. Would current decision-making change, for instance, if those involved know there will be a responsibility record in the Library? That they would be held accountable for posterity?

Through the Clock/Library, Brand wants us to experience at both a concrete and a mythic level the notion of long term responsibility through a profound engagement with time. The Clock is an antidote to rapid change, a stabiliser, a grounding. Through the concept of the Long Now, the Foundation has developed a set of guidelines for an 'organisation which intends to survive and be valuable for a very long time' (p 00:53). These are to serve the long view (and the long viewer), to foster responsibility, to reward patience, to mind mythic depth, to take no sides, to leverage longevity and perplexingly, to ally with competition. The latter seems strangely inconsistent with the ethos of the project.

This is a brilliant, inspirational and mind-boggling concept. Brand invokes some powerful futures concepts here, such as the notion of responsibility, of effective decision-making and, most importantly, of timeframe thinking. Through telling of the Clock/Library, Brand combines wise use of cutting edge technological thinking with a profound philosophical look at humanity's time on this planet. *The Clock of the Long Now* is a marvellous book and is as easy to read as its ideas are exciting. I couldn't put it down.

This project is happening now. You are invited to have input into the concept through the Foundation's website at <[www.longnow.org](http://www.longnow.org)> ●

*Reviewed by: Caroline Smith*

## ***The Long Boom – a vision for the coming age of prosperity***

*Peter Schwartz, Peter Leyden and Joel Hyatt, Orion Business Books, 2000.*

What do you do when you finish reading a thought-provoking book? Are you willing to engage in conversation with those of a contrary opinion, in the spirit of mutual discovery and elucidation, enlarging your ideas and clarifying your misconceptions, genuinely open to dialogue in its pure sense? Now imagine that you could carry on this conversation with the whole world! The Long Boom is not simply a conventional static book, written, published and finished. Rather, the book is another step in a broader project of discussion and consideration, whose participants are to be drawn from the wider world — the Internet — to facilitate that discussion. So, fire up your web browser and have a look at <[www.thelongboom.org](http://www.thelongboom.org)> to see, and join into, the continuing conversation.

The Long Boom as a public concept goes back to about mid-1997, when Peters Schwartz and Leyden published an article of the same name in *Wired* magazine. In it, they painted a picture of the next twenty years, characterising the period from 1980 to 2020 as a forty-year ‘long boom’, analogous to the post-WW2 economic boom. We are, they argued, therefore in the middle of another long economic boom driven by a similar unleashing of military technology into the wider world. The article was unabashedly optimistic about how technology (particularly information technology) would pave the way for the raising of living standards of not millions but billions of people around the world, to an essentially middleclass level.

The present book is a very much-expanded version of the original article, filling in many details and fleshing out many ramifications of what this increased prosperity would mean. While it is easy to lose sight of the fact (owing to the up-beat tone), the authors view the ‘future history’ presented in *The Long Boom* as simply one possible, desirable trajectory, not a prediction. This positive vision is by no means assured. Therefore, we need to be mindful of the choices we make to ensure they are as wise as they can possibly be. ‘We must choose to create a better future,’ they say, because ‘it won’t come without us.’

The book is comprised of three major threads. The main narrative is written in the contemporary voice of the authors – optimistic and confident. Interwoven with this narrative are eight scenarios, written from the vantage-point of a historical documentary series being broadcast in 2050. These scenarios deal with certain key events, crises and choices the world ‘made’ (from the point of view of 2050) during the long boom, and are written in the matter of fact tone of someone describing long-past events. Punctuating these threads is a collection of six of the letters written by a fictitious man to his friends over the course of his life. The first letter is written when he is just entering the world beyond university education in 1980. We then see those letters that were written every ten years from 1980 to 2020, and a final one at the end of his life in 2050. This collection is a device designed to ground the potentially abstract assertions of the scenarios and narrative in the actual personal experience of someone living through it.

There is much to recommend the book, yet I am also struck by what was omitted. On the one hand it paints a very positive vision — a normative future scenario, if you will, which is very appealing. On the other, the human element is mostly absent, notwithstanding the human character provided to anchor the text. The book is masterful in its analysis of technological, economic and political systems and their externalities. The associated interior realities of individual consciousness and culture, however, are dealt with scantily by comparison. I believe it is of the first importance to consider these dimensions on an equal footing with the usual technological and economic ones. Hopefully the ongoing website discussions will enable this to be done.

When speaking of *The Long Boom* as an idea, there are actually three different layers to consider — the original article, the present book, and the new website. These correspond to the past idea, its present manifestation and the future discussions that will stem from it. Perhaps more than anything else, this is what caught my imagination about the book — that it serves as a starting point for a wider discussion using the very enabling technology which it is so enamoured of. Enabling technology is certainly important – it’s just not enough by itself. There has to be a shift in human consciousness that is prepared to make use of the technology for moral and ethical purposes before any real benefit can accrue.

Once upon a time, the internet was actually used as a tool for communication. In those days, way back before the current fairy floss ‘dot-com’ fever, the Internet was simply an information conduit, nothing more nor less. Having come from that tradition and vintage, I am always happy to see the technology put to good use as a facilitator of communication and collaboration. And it is largely to this use that the Long Boom website is put. Most of the book is online, so you can browse before you buy it, if you want to. But the best part is the option to actually get involved in fleshing out this ‘first draft idea’ as presented by the authors. And I think it is this that is the defining aspect of the book — as a vehicle for engaging people in thinking about what sort of future we want to create in the next twenty years.

The best futures work is done as part of a discourse, and this necessarily requires the interaction of people through ‘conversation’ in whatever form that takes. The Long Boom website enables conversation on a grand scale, and everyone with web access has the option to contribute. So, let me finish with an offer which Schwartz, Leyton and Hyatt make to us (p287): ‘the world has no comprehensive vision of how to evolve in a way that will benefit everyone. ... We want to help solve that problem by offering this Long Boom vision ... to get people started thinking positively about our future and our destiny. By all means improve this draft. We hope you will do so.’ ●

*Reviewed by: Dr Joseph Voros*

## 1994

- The Seven Cultures of Capitalism* by Charles Hampden-Turner & Fons Trompenaars (Piatkus) .....\$21.20
- \**Capitalism(s) in Competition* by Eric Best (GBN) .....\$17.00
- Global Change* by Keith Suter (Albatross Books) .....\$26.95
- Where to From Here* by Leonie V Still (Business & Professional Publishing) .....\$27.95
- \**The Structure of Entrapment* by Charles Hampden-Turner (GBN) .....\$17.50
- \**White Eye* by Blanche d'Alpuget (Viking) .....\$19.95
- The Management Myth* by Richard David Hames (Business & Professional Publishing) .....\$39.95
- The Ecology of Commerce* by Paul Hawken (Weidenfeld & Nicholson) .....\$34.95
- The Executive Compass* by James O'Toole (Oxford University Press) .....\$34.95
- \**Messengers of the Gods* by James Cowan (Random House) .....\$17.00
- \**Values and the Corporation* by James Ogilvy et al (GBN).....\$20.00
- The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* by Peter Senge (Nicholas Brealey) .....\$49.95
- \**Turbulent Mirror* by John Briggs & F David Peat (HarperCollins) .....\$26.95
- The Last Three Minutes* by Paul Davies (Weidenfeld & Nicholson) .....\$24.95
- Leadership and the New Science* by Margaret Wheatley (Berrett-Koehler).....\$29.45

## 1995

- Framing Technology* by Leila Green & Roger Guiner y (Allen & Unwin) .....\$22.95
- Competing for the Future* by Gary Hamel & CK Prahalad (Harvard Business School Press) (PB) \$25.95 (HB) .....\$54.95
- The Future Eaters* by Tim Flannery (Reed Books).....\$39.95
- Learning Unlimited* by Alastair Rylatt (Business & Professional Publishing) .....\$34.95
- Enterprising Nations: The Karpin Report* (Commonwealth of Australia) .....\$29.95
- Australian Civilisation* edited by Richard Nile (Oxford University Press).....\$24.95
- Creative Compartments* by Gerard Fairtlough (Adamantine Press) .....\$28.95
- Challenge to Change* by Richard Eckersley and Kevin Jeans (CSIRO Publications) .....\$34.95
- The Death of Economics* by Paul Omerod (Penguin Books) .....\$16.95
- The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* by Christopher Lasch (Norton) .....\$39.95
- The Knowledge Creating Company* by Ikujiro Nonaka & Kiroataka Takeuchi (Oxford University Press) .....\$55.00
- \**Living Without a Goal* by James Ogilvy (Doubleday) .....\$39.95

## 1996

- Jihad vs McWorld* by Benjamin R Barber (Times Books) .....\$35.00
- \**Lords of the Rim* by Sterling Seagrave (G P Putnam's Sons).....\$43.95
- Trust* by Francis Fukuyama (The Free Press) .....\$45.00
- How are we to Live?* by Peter Singer (Mandarin Books).....\$16.95
- An Intimate History of Humanity* by Theodore Zeldin (Minerva).....\$19.95
- \**Having Our Say about the Future* (ASTECC) .....Free
- Maximum Leadership* by Charles Farkas, Philippe de Backer & Allen Sheppard (Orion).....\$19.95
- Leadership in a New Era* edited by John Renesch (New Leaders Press Sterling and Stone).....\$49.95
- Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation* by Kees van der Heijden (John Wiley & Sons) .....\$69.95
- The State We're In* by Will Hutton (Vintage) .....\$19.95

## 1997

- Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman (Bantam Books).....\$19.95
- The Dilbert Principle* by Scott Adams (HarperCollins).....\$24.95
- The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* by Samuel P Huntington (Simon and Schuster).....\$39.95

- The Future of Capitalism* by Lester Thurow (Allen & Unwin).....\$19.95
- The Foresight Principle* by Richard Slaughter (Adamantine Press) .....\$33.50
- Burying the 20th Century* by Richard Hames with Geraldine Callanan (Business & Professional Publishing) .....\$39.95
- Is Australia an Asian Country?* by Stephen Fitzgerald (Allen & Unwin).....\$19.95
- Mastering the Infinite Game* by Charles Hampden-Turner & Fons Trompenaars (Capstone).....\$38.95
- The Living Company* by Arie de Gues (Harvard Business School Press) .....\$45.00
- Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn* by Donald Michael (Miles River Press).....\$42.00
- Tyranny of Fortune* by Reg Little & Warren Reed (Business & Professional Publishing).....\$29.95
- Intelligent Leadership* by Alistair Mant (Allen & Unwin).....\$24.95
- Factor 4: The new Report to the Club of Rome* by Weizsacker & Lovins (Allen & Unwin) .....\$24.95
- Cybercorp: the new business revolution* by Games Martin (Amacom) .....\$49.95

## 1998

- Corporate Collapse: Regulation, Accounting and Ethical Failure* by FL Clarke, GW Dean & KG Oliver (Cambridge).....\$29.95
- Japan: A Reinterpretation* by Patrick Smith (Pantheon Books).....\$49.95
- Do Lunch or be Lunch* by Howard Stevenson with Jeffrey Cruikshank (Harvard Business School Press).....\$49.95
- The Fourth Turning* by William Strauss & Neil Howe (Broadway Books).....\$26.95
- Imagined Worlds* by Freeman Dyson (Harvard University Press) .....\$47.50
- Scenario Planning: Managing for the Future* by Gill Ringland (John Wiley & Sons) .....\$60.95
- Learning from the Future: Competitive Foresight Scenarios* by Liam Fahey & Robert M Randall (John Wiley & Sons) .....\$62.95
- The Hungry Spirit* by Charles Handy (Hutchinson) .....\$35.00
- Measuring Progress* edited by Richard Eckersley (CSIRO) .....\$34.95
- Close to the Machine* by Ellen Ullman (City Lights Books).....\$22.95
- Out of Control* by Kevin Kelly (Fourth Estate) .....\$17.95
- New Rules for the New Economy* by Kevin Kelly (Fourth Estate).....\$31.50

## 1999

- The Information Age: Society and Culture Volume I The Rise of the Network Society* by Manuel Castells (Blackwell Publishers) .....\$40.50
- The Information Age: Society and Culture Volume II The Power of Identity* by Manuel Castells (Blackwell Publishers).....\$40.50
- The Pattern on the Stone* by W Daniel Hillis (Basic Books) .....\$31.50
- The Weightless World: Thriving in the digital world* by Dianne Coyle (Capstone Publishing Ltd).....\$31.50
- When Things Start to Think* by Neil Gershenfeld (Henry Holt & Co)....\$39.00
- When Good Companies Do Bad Things* by Peter Schwartz & Blair Gibb (Wiley).....\$49.45
- Futures for the Third Millennium* by R A Slaughter (Prospect Media)....\$35.95
- Satan, CEO* by Stanley Schaezel (Prospect Media).....\$21.95

## 2000

- The Clock of the Long Now Stewart Brand, Basic Books, 1999*.....\$26.95
- The Long Boom - a vision for the coming age of prosperity* Peter Schwartz, Peter Leyden and Joel Hyatt., Orion Business Books .....\$44.95

\*These books are currently unavailable